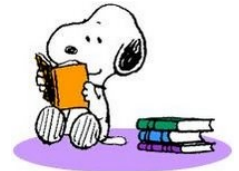




# RGS: Bonkers About Books!

September 2025



Hi,

Happy new school year to you all! For those of you who haven't met me yet, as well as my role as assistant head pastoral, I am possibly best known in school for my love of books. I read a lot (36 books over the summer alone!), largely middle grade (books for children aged 7—13) but also YA and some books for adults too! I share my love of reading with the children as much as I can and also write this monthly newsletter to keep parents and children abreast of new releases, books I've read and book events in school. I am always happy to help with book recommendations if you need them.

This year 11th September is the big day for book publications (it's known as a 'Super Thursday') so the majority of the books in this edition will be published on that day.

Happy reading.

**Mrs Wall**

## Lessons In Death—Sophie McKenzie

Georgia and her best friend Billy are trying out for the school play that's being organised by Mr Truckle. After the first rehearsal, Georgia realises she's left her bag in school and returns to fetch it from the rehearsal room when she hears a noise. Going to investigate, she finds Mr Truckle dead in the library. She races to get help but when she returns, Mr Truckle has vanished. Unfortunately, none of the staff believe Georgia when she tells them, so she confides in Billy who promises to help her find out exactly what has happened. And so the pair embark upon solving the mystery.

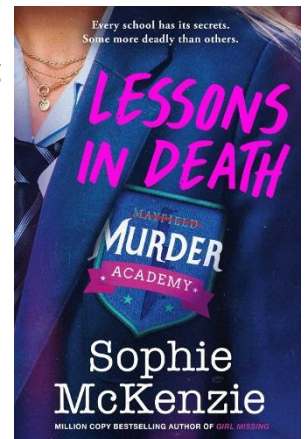
I love a good murder mystery so was excited by the sound of **Lessons In Death**. I must admit that the blurb, at first glance, made me think of Murder Most Unladylike; however, one chapter in and I was quickly reassured that the books would be very different (don't get me wrong, I'm a huge fan of Robin's books, I just didn't want them to be similar).

The pace of the book is fast and you are quickly swept away trying to work out what exactly has happened to Mr Truckle. It's clear he's a well-liked member of staff and Georgia can't understand why staff aren't more worried. Mention of messages from him don't reassure her so she feels she has no choice but to take matters into her own hands.

There is a strong bond between Georgia and Billy, but then Wren enters the equation. New to the school, she is keen to make friends. Georgia is aware that her mum and Wren's were childhood friends but Georgia seems reluctant to befriend her. Wren is just keen to fit in and is desperate for that sense of belonging so why is Georgia so reluctant - this element of the plot will create interesting discussions. Georgia is resilient, stubborn and clearly has her faults - I like that about her.

Set in a secondary school, there is a more grown-up feel to the book whilst maintaining an MG appropriateness, making it perfect for pre-teens who aren't quite ready for YA yet. I already know that the book is going to be popular with my Year 6s.

Publishing 11th September, **Lessons In Death** is a page-turner of a book full of twists that will keep readers guessing until the end (I didn't guess the outcome!). I love that this is the first in a new series and I can't wait to read more.



### The Big Bad Wolf Murder—P. G. Bell

It's the final of Tooth & Claw, a tournament where teams of runners must escape vicious wolves, and Ruby and her team are seconds away from victory over Alarick (known as the biggest baddest wolf) when he drops down dead putting a halt to everything. Confusion ensues and then the police announce that Alarick has been murdered... and Ruby is their prime suspect. Knowing she isn't guilty, she is determined to discover who the real murderer is so goes on the run in order to prove her innocence. Along with her new wolf friend, Fillan, she faces her toughest challenge yet.

**The Big Bad Wolf Murder** is the second in P. G. Bell's fairy tale murder mysteries (you can read my review of *The Beanstalk Murder* [here](#)), and the prospect of seeing how he had twisted another tale excited me.

This is an ingenious, fast-paced take on a traditional fairy tale - think Riding Hood meets Hunger Games! Tooth & Claw is a tournament that gets as much attention in Netherburg as a football world-cup final does here, so everyone is watching the tournament... and nobody expects anything to go wrong, least of all Ruby. She is a fiercely determined character whose drive is evident from the very start of the book. Success is all she knows and she's not about to let a wrongful accusation stand in her way. She and Fillan make a great team: he is drawn into this purely because he was delivering to Alarick before the tournament. He doesn't want to be involved anymore than Ruby does. He lacks in confidence at the beginning but the more he is with Ruby, the more confident he gets. It's lovely to see their friendship grow as their mission unfolds.

Publishing 11th September, **The Big Bad Wolf Murder** is a brilliant second book in the series. A perfect stand alone, this book is full of action, adventure with a generous sprinkling of fun which combine to create the recipe for a wonderful read.

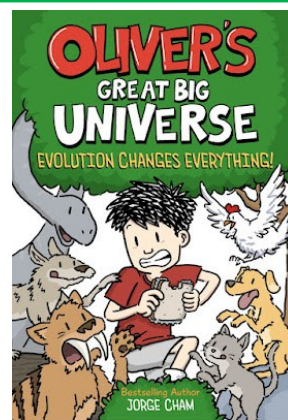
This is the book 6W have chosen as their daily read. Their verdict so far: they're enjoying it!!!



### Oliver's Great Big Universe: Evolution Changes Everything - Jorge Cham

Oliver is back and this time he's writing a book about animals and evolution so he can raise money to buy himself a new computer. From cats to dinosaurs, mass extinction to the planet itself, the book looks at how things have evolved combining science with laughter and a host of wonderful illustrations. The book is full of facts that will engage readers and impart new knowledge without them realising it. There's even a section for those who want to learn more, and a double page at the end with quick facts readers can share with others.

**Evolution Changes Everything** is a great addition to a fab series but can also be read as a stand alone. Publishing on the 11th September, the book is perfect for fans of Diary of A Wimpy Kid and Louis Stowell's Loki and I think would go down well with year 3 and 4 in particular.



### Skandar And The Spirit War - A. F. Steadman BADGES UP FOR GRABS!



So, the final instalment of this epic series is out and we now know how it ends (I won't spoil it for those of you yet to read it but strap yourself in as it's one heck of an adventure. Feel free to come and chat once you've read it; I've already had students come to find me so they can go through the events and discuss all the revelations! But, what do we do now? Fear not, although this is the last book in the series, we don't have to leave Skandar's world yet as Annabel has written a prequel! **The First Unicorn Rider** will let us know how the legend began and publishes on the 6th November so there isn't long to wait!



*The eagle-eyed amongst you will have seen that I am sporting a Spirit War badge on my lanyard! I have four spares to give away! All you have to do is to write to tell me why you think you should have one. I'll pick four winners randomly on the 19th September.*

## The Midnight Sweet Factory - Clare Povey

When Midnight Treats, a new sweet shop, is due to open in the area everybody is excited, especially when the owner, Melissa Midnight, bills it as '*a sweet shop where magic and science collide.*' But when Joseph unwraps his free gobstopper to find an unsigned note hidden inside from someone claiming to be trapped in the Midnight Forest, he immediately shares it with his sister and their friends. Things then take an even more sinister turn when the owners of Cousteau's sweet shop announce that their son has gone missing. Flo and Joseph, along with their friends Funmi and Isaac decide there's no time to lose and begin to investigate what is going on. But in order to do that, they must find the Midnight Forest and head there themselves, which may prove more dangerous than they could ever imagine.



I'm a huge fan of Clare's books having loved the *Bastien Bonlivre* duology and been swept away by the first book in **The Wander-days** series [Journey To Fantome Island](#), so I was absolutely thrilled when I discovered that I could dive into **The Midnight Sweet Factory**, the second book in the series, before it was published.

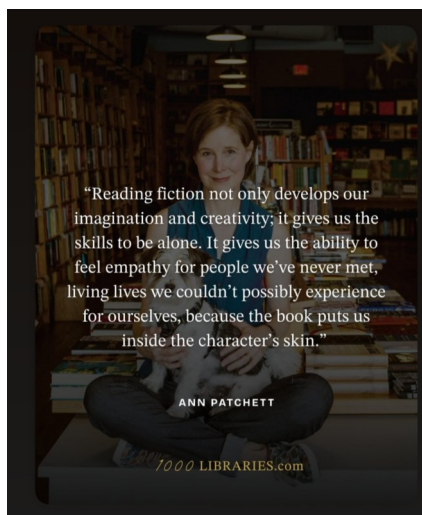
We catch-up with the four friends at Aderemi Adventure Park where they are enjoying a day of exciting rides, unaware of the adventure that awaits them. The first chapter also weaves in a reminder of what happened in the first book which I love as it helped to jog my memory and also acts as a great intro to those who are diving straight in at book 2 (which it's perfectly possible to do).

It's the end of the summer holidays and it is clear that the friends' parents have been more cautious since the events of book one; however, the four aren't to be deterred and they know they have to get to the bottom of what is going on. They make a great team, drawing on their individual talents and, like last time, I really like that we see Joseph and his anxiety being brilliantly explored - it's something many children will experience and Clare is very good at portraying exactly what it feels like and how children can deal with it - it really makes him one of my favourite characters.

There is action and adventure running right through this book and I stayed up way past my bedtime last night in order to discover what happened at the end! It's a gripping read. However, I have one piece of advice: have a stash of sweets at hand whilst reading as the book definitely made my mouth water! Once they reach the forest, I think Clare took inspiration from Willy Wonka and her descriptions are deliciously wonderful. I also loved the Wonderlandesque inside of the factory—it's somewhere I'd love to visit if it were real!

Alongside the adventure, there are messages about dealing with emotions, taking care of the natural world, friendship and dealing with events in the past which are all skilfully woven into the book, all of which will make readers think.

Publishing on the 11th September, **The Midnight Sweet Factory** shows us that Clare has, once again, proved that she is a writer who is able to perfectly capture children's imaginations and **The Midnight Sweet Factory** will tickle the tastebuds and fire-up the adrenaline.



This edition of Bonkers About Books was proof-read by:

**Sophie W**





### **The Strange Disappearance of Imogen Good - Kirsty Applebaum**

When Fran's mum needs to join her dad on a business trip, Fran is bundled off to her aunt and uncle's for the week. She really isn't looking forward to it as she doesn't enjoy spending time with her cousin Imogen; however, when she gets there, she quickly discovers that something is very wrong, for her aunt and uncle insist that they don't have a daughter, despite her room and things being there. So Fran sets out to discover what is going on, enlisting the help of Bex who lives a few doors away. But there's more to this than she first imagines, something involving the nearby Stillness Hall. Can Imogen discover exactly what's going on before her mum returns in only five days?

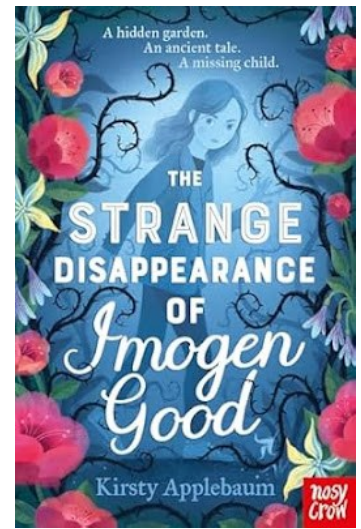
Fran is clearly unhappy about being dumped at her aunt and uncle's and really doesn't want to spend time with her cousin, but all that changes very quickly. She's a fiercely determined character who will stop at nothing to get to the truth; however, she also learns a few things about herself along the way which would make for interesting discussions. There is a really eerie quality to the plot, both in the idea of Imogen having disappeared and nobody remembering her, and in the parallel narrative that runs through the book which tells the story of The Twelve Statues of Stillness Hall.

The entire story is set in and around the grounds of Stillness Hall. Even just the name conjures up an eerie feel, but there's also Ms Quincey and the gardens which all combine to create an atmosphere that will send shivers down readers' spines. Add in the idea that a girl has gone missing and her parents seem to have simply forgotten she existed and it all makes for a rather chilling plot, despite its summer setting.

The mystery is drip fed throughout the book with the story being told from different perspectives (Fran's, Imogen's and the story of The Twelve Statues of Stillness Hall) that along with the short chapters absolutely guarantees that readers are gripped and won't be able to put the book down.

At its heart, this book is a captivating read about friendship and what it means to be a good friend. It's wonderfully written with relatable characters that readers will find themselves drawn to.

Publishing on the 11th September, **The Strange Disappearance of Imogen Good** is the perfect read for September.



### **Time Keys: Legend of Viking Thunder - M. G. Leonard**

Jeopardy's dad is missing and she and Sim are determined to find him. Along with Sim's mum and their friend Nelson, they find themselves on a perilous journey back to the Viking times, trying to stay one step ahead of the Council of Keys who are determined to arrest Emmett. Meanwhile, Emmett is intent on locating the the legendary Gjallarhorn which is said to bring eternal destruction if it's blown. Emmett feels that possessing this will protect himself and his family from the Council. But they are not alone in their quest and, if they aren't careful, the Gjallarhorn could end up in the wrong hands which would prove disastrous.

Like the first book, **The Legend of Viking Thunder** is a book full of adrenaline and adventure from the very beginning. Weaving through time and navigating the dangers they face, the team are intent on doing what is right but can they really trust Emmett?

I loved the **Hunt For The Golden Scarab** in this series and it was wonderful to be able to catch-up with the characters again. It was also great to be introduced to a host of new characters, some of them definitely nicer than others!

This is the perfect book for history lovers and is an immersive dive into the Viking era - I could see it being a brilliant whole class read during a Viking topic. Whilst it would be useful to have the knowledge of the first book, it would also make a brilliant stand-alone novel.

Publishing on the 11th September, **The Legend of Viking Thunder** is a rollercoaster of an adventure through time that weaves suspense and wonderful storytelling perfectly to grip readers and leaving them desperate for the next adventure which is teased at the end of this book (The Impossible Gladiator) - I can't wait!



## A Stocking Full Of Spies - Robin Stevens

It's December 1941 and May is still determined to leave Deepdean School, so she is thrilled when a bomb drops on the school, destroying the gym (which was empty at the time). As a result, May and Nuala are sent to stay with Hazel in Bletchley where (along with Eric who is already there) they are given jobs as junior messengers; however, this is a front so the trio can investigate the death of one of the codebreakers. At first glance it appears to have been Daisy's brother, Bertie, who shot him and it's up to May, Nuala and Eric to find the evidence to prove his innocence - they also need to discover who the real killer was and who the spy at the park is.

Ok, I'm going to have to admit that this is one of those reviews that I've found tricky to write! Not because the book isn't brilliant - because it completely and utterly is - but because I'm struggling to put together how great I found it! What I really want to say is, 'OMG, that was amazing! Go out and read it immediately and then let me know as soon as you've read it so we can discuss the plot in detail!' but I know I need to say more than that so I've given it my best shot - excuse my ramblings!

**A Stocking Full of Spies** arrived for me one Wednesday during the summer holidays which meant all plans were dropped and I spent the day in the garden reading (a terrible hardship, I know!). Robin's books are hugely popular in school, and have been since they were first published (in fact, she was treated with rockstar status when she visited us way back in 2016!). The beauty of her books is the timeless quality of them, the joy of the mystery, the puzzle of trying to work out who the culprit is - it's no wonder she's won so many awards for her work. There's something completely thrilling about the start of one of these books; whilst Robin doesn't shy away from the horrors of the war, there is a joy in the innocence of the time (does that make sense? After all, the main characters are investigating murders and dealing with dangerous criminals!). What I mean is, the time period means there are no mobile phones, no social media - it feels more wholesome.

Robin once again has woven her magic to create an intricate plot with twists, a host of believable suspects, and characters who are wonderfully individual (more about that later). I didn't guess the culprits and, at the end of the book, I sat in awe of how Robin must plot things out - I'd love to have a conversation about her methods (I have visions of the wall full of pictures, notes and string linking everything together).

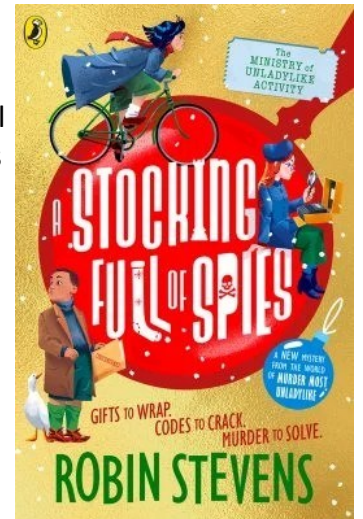
The book is set in Bletchley, which is a place that has fascinated me since I visited it. And although the book doesn't focus on the code-breaking, it does give you an insight into what life must have been like for those who lived and worked there.

I also want to mention the individuality of the characters: we already know that Nuala, Eric and May are very different to each other and that's what makes things work between them (when they aren't arguing!). I feel that we see more of May's character coming to the fore this time and I think there are many readers who will see parts of themselves in her (something that I think is really important in MG literature). I also like the individuality of the other characters and the importance of them being able to be themselves at Bletchley. Robin's author's note at the end explains things far more eloquently than I could so please read it, but it made my heart sing to see this celebrated. **A Stocking Full of Spies** is a thrilling mix of murder, spies, Christmas and mystery; with Hazel and Daisy's return a wonderful added bonus! It's guaranteed to grip and to keep you guessing until the end!

I could easily gush about **A Stocking Full of Spies** and the entire series forever and a day, and I'm hugely grateful to Robin for creating books that I return to again and again (they are my comfort reads and Chelsea buns have become a favourite!).

Before I start sounding like a complete loon, I will simply say that **A Stocking Full of Spies** publishes on the 11th September. It's a gripping mystery perfect for curling up with as the nights become colder or as a stocking-filler this Christmas.

Detective Society Forever.





### The Book Of Stolen Dreams - David Farr

Rachel and Robert are back in the final instalment of *The Book Of Stolen Dreams* series. When famous movie star Emil Bonfleur goes missing in the desert, everyone is devastated, and when he turns up alive and well five days later celebrations are organised, but Rachel is wary: something doesn't feel right and she is determined to get to the bottom of what is going on. It doesn't take long for her to discover that Charles Malstain is making a bid to once again seize power, and Rachel and her brother Robert have no choice but to risk their lives to save the day once more.

This has been a series I have adored since reading a proof of the first book in 2021 and I've been eagerly following Rachel and Robert's story ever since (you can read my reviews of the first two books here: [The Book Of Stolen Dreams](#) , [The Secret Of The Blood Red Key](#)). **The Final Battle** was waiting for me when I got home from Paris after the bank holiday, bypassed my reading pile and I curled up with it as soon as I'd finished the book I was reading.

Like the rest of the series, the book is action-packed and full of adventure. The writing transports you immediately to Krasnia where life is good for the Klein family, which is lovely to see after everything they've been through. However, this doesn't last long and, once again, the pair are forced into life-threatening situations in order to save their family and the people of Krasnia - they are truly brave characters and it's been so good to see them develop as the series has progressed.

This is a rollercoaster of an adventure that is utterly unputdownable (yes, I did try to read it whilst making dinner!). With numerous heart-stopping situations, readers will find themselves wondering whether the siblings can beat the odds. With the pair needing to split up in the mission, we see Rachel really coming to the fore. But be warned, I did shed a tear at the end...

The book (and indeed the entire series) is the ultimate battle of good versus evil and Malstain's actions really made my skin crawl on so many occasions. He is a truly heinous villain, one readers will love to hate.



### What I'll be buying on the 11th September!

Yes, believe it or not, there are books I haven't managed to read before the 11th and here's what's on my shopping list:

